(f) if not, the steps taken by the Government on the issue of joining the Indian Ocean Rim ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF LAW AND JUSTICE (SHRI RAMAKANT D. KHALAP) : (a) Yes, Sir. The first meeting of the Council of Ministers held in Mauritius in March 1997 adopted the Charter and formally launched the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC)

(b) The objectives and purpose of IOR-ARC include:-

(i) To promote the sustained growth and balanced development of the region and of the Member States, and to create common ground for regional economic cooperation;

(ii) To focus on those areas of economic cooperation which provide maximum opportunities to develop shared interests and reap mutual benefits. Towards this end, to formulate and implement projects for economic cooperation relating to trade facilitation, promotion and liberalisation; promotion of foreign investment, scientific and technological exchanges, and tourism, movement of natural persons and service providers; and development of infrastructure and human resources;

(iii) To encourage close interaction of trade and industry, academic institutions, scholars and the peoples of the Member States.

(iv) To strengthen cooperation and dialogue among Member States in international fora on global economic issues.

(v) To promote cooperation in development of human resources, particularly through closer linkages among training institutions, universities and other specialised institutions of the Member States

(c) The IOR-ARC consists of fourteen members, viz. Australia India, Indonesia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Singapore, Sri Lanka South Africa, Tanzania and Yemen. A 'pilot mechanism' for coordination, servicing and monitoring implementation of policy decisions as well as for administrative matters is to be set up in Mauritius.

(d) India had successfully coordinated the preparation of the IOR-ARC Charter. Presently, India is coordinating the implementation of four economic cooperation projects included in the Work Programme of IOR-ARC, viz. (i) Indian Ocean Rim Business Centre and IORNET; (ii) Trade Promotion Programme and IOR Trade Fair in India; (iii) IOR Chair in Indian Ocean Studies and Associate Fellows and (iv) Investment facilitation and Promotion. At the same time, India will also be participating in the economic cooperation projects being coordinated by other IOR-ARC member countries.

(e) and (f) No, Sir. Cooperation within IOR-ARC is without prejudice to rights and obligations entered into by Member States within the framework of other economic and trade cooperation arrangements. It is not a substitute for, but seeks to reinforce, be complementary to and consistent with bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral obligations of member States.

Hydrocarbon Reserve

6136. DR. C. SILVERA:

SHRI A.G.S. RAMBABU:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether some recent survey undertaken in the north-east part of the Bay of Bengal has indicated huge reserves of hydrocarbon;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether the Government propose to get scientific data of the survey analysed in the interest of the coutnry; and

(d) if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): :(a) to (d) Under the Joint Venture Speculative Survey Programme, DGH in association with Western Geophysical Co., USA, has carried out 2D seismic surveys together with gravity and magnetic surveys in the deep wate areas of Eastern offshore of India including Andaman offshore. The processing of the data is currently under progress and interpretation work will commence soon immediately after completion of processing.

[Translation]

Fate of Hostages

6137. KUMARI UMA BHARATI :

SHRI ANAND RATNA MAURYA :

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government are aware of the statements issued by the relatives and well wishers of the foreign hostages, who were made hostages around two years back, in which they have stated that Pakistan know about the abductors of their near and dear ones;

(b) if so, whether the Government have held any talk with Pakistan to get the foreign hostages freed; and

(c) if so, the details thereof ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PERESONNEL, PUBLIC GRIEVANCES AND PENSIONS AND MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS (SHRI. S.R. BALASUBRAMONIYAN) : (a) Government are aware of reports in the media in this regard.

(b) and (c) The Government has, through diplomatic

channels, consistently been urging the Pakistani Authorities to help in securing the release of hostages, since the group responsible for the abduction and hostage taking of the foreign nationals is based in, and operates out of that country, and is receiving active assistance from the Pakistani agencies for its activities in Jammu and Kashmir.

[English]

Religious Shrines in India and Pakistan

6138. SHRI TARIQ ANWAR : Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that India has decided that number of religious shrines in India which can be visited by Pakistani pilgrims will be increased;

(b) if so, whether Pakistan Government is likely to reciprocate this decision;

(c) if so, the details thereof; and

(d) if not, the reasons therefor ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF LAW AND JUSTICE (SHRI RAMAKANT D. KHALAP) : (a) to (d) Government have stated their decision to increase the number of religious shrines which can be visited by Pakistani pilgrims. The visits to religious shrines in India/ Pakistan are governed by the bilateral Protocol on Visits to Religious Shrines signed between the two countries in 1974. Government will take up the matter regarding the increase in number of religious shrines with Pakistan under the bilateral Protocol.

[Translation]

Wages in Rural Areas

6139. PROF. PREM SINGH CHANDUMAJRA : Will the Minister of LABOUR be pleased to state:

(a) whether the attention of the Government has been drawn to the news-item captioned "A pathetic To Farm Labourers' published in the 'Pioneer' dated April 7, 1997;

(b) if so, whether there had been decrease in rural wages in the year 1994-95 and 1995-96 respectively inspite of the annual rate of growth being over 7 percent during the said year;

(c) if not, the estimate of the Government in this regard; and

(d) the estimate made by the Government in regard to the rural wages in the year 1996-97 ?

THE MINISTER OF LABOUR (SHRI M. ARUNACHALAM): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) As per the Economic Survey 1996-97 the real wages for unskilled agricultural labourer's increased steadily at 5.21% in 1992-93 and 5.61% in 1993-94 though they declined marginally in 1994-95 and 1995-96 by 0.50% and 0.69% respectively.

(d) The estimate of the real wages of agricultural labourers during 1996-97 has not been made so far. However, a statement indicating the available information on existing rates of Minimum wages in respect of unskilled category of agricultural Labourer is given in the attached statement.

Statement

Daily Rates of Minimum Wages For Agricultural Workers Fixed by Different States/UTs Under The Minimum-Wages Act, 1948

(As on 1.10.96)

Sl. No	State/UTs	Minimum wages for unskilled agricultural workers
1	2	3
1.	Andhra Pradesh	Rs. 30.00 to Rs. 36.50 p.d. (According to Zones) (12.2.96)
2.	Arunachal Pradesh	Rs. 21.00 to Rs. 23.00 p.d. (According to Areas) (1.11.90)
3.	Assam	Rs. 1134.00 p.m.* or Rs. 984.00 p.m. plus food, shelter and clothing (1.8.89)